

****ATTENTION****

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COUGAR

The cougar (*Felis concolor*) is North America's most widespread native cat. Known variously as puma, panther and mountain lion, the cougar has succeeded in avoiding or adapting to the presence of humans in ways that the other great predators—the grizzly and the timber wolf—couldn't.

Description

The cougar is a large sleek cat. The combined length of its body and tail frequently exceeds seven feet. Large males may weigh up to 180 lbs. Adult females are usually smaller than the males. Adult animals can be reddish-brown, dusty-tan or gray in color, with lighter undersides and a black tip on the tail. The backs of the ears are black. Cougar kittens are about 12 inches long as newborn; fur is spotted.

Habitat

Two subspecies of cougar inhabit Washington. Subspecies *mis-soulensis* occupies the eastern Okanogan Highlands and Selkirk Mountains in northeastern Wash-

ington State and the Blue Mountains in southeastern Washington. Subspecies *oreogonensis* ranges through the Cascade Range, the Willapa Hills and the Olympic Mountains.

Cougar inhabits the same general range as its prey species—deer, elk, mountain goat, and mountain sheep. In North America, the cougar is distributed throughout most of the mountain, intermountain and coastal regions west of the Great Plains, the Gulf Coast of Texas and Louisiana and the southern tip of Florida. In Washington cougar populations appear to be stable, numbering about 1,500 animals.

Ideal cougar habitat is broken terrain with mixed and semi-open forests. Threats to cougar habitat come mainly in the form of threats to the habitat of their prey. Adequate winter range for deer is particularly important if cougar are to thrive.

Life History

The cougar begins its life as one of up to six kittens born at any time of year following a gestation period of between 88 and 97 days. Rearing

of the young is left entirely to the mother—parents separate after mating. Young stay with their mother until they are about two years old and can hunt entirely for themselves. Adult cats are roamers, often covering a home range of 75-100 miles in a short time.

Management

Wildlife management has evolved considerably since the days when bounties were offered for the killing of the big cats. The role of predators in regulating prey species, including deer and elk, is a vital component of wildlife management.

Cougar are taken only by permit hunters in Washington and mostly with the use of hounds. Statewide, the cougar population is estimated at about 1,500 and seasons are set to take about 100 animals. For specific hunting regulations, consult the Washington Department of Wildlife brochure, *Mountain Goat, Sheep, Moose, Cougar, and Lynx Hunting Seasons*.